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ABSTRACT

In Taiwan, traditional pedagogy and technique-oriented teaching methods have become too outdated to enable students to fight with a society full of complicated and confusing socio-cultural phenomena. An art education curriculum change is needed, and innovative art programs should be developed with careful consideration of the socio-cultural environment. After exploring the cultural and educational implications in installation art, this paper proposes a model of a creative art program by integrating installation art with craft-making classes for art teachers. The paper contends that the craft-making class could be integrated with learning installation art as a more updated, innovative form of promoting visual communication, personal expression, and socio-cultural commentary. An art program was designed to serve 240 preservice teachers who took an arts and crafts courses, the fourfold goal of which stressed: (1) introducing students to multiple aspects of installation art; (2) sharpening students' thinking about themselves; (3) developing their sensitivity and flexibility toward creative art teaching; and (4) bridging students' social lives with art experience. It implemented through strategies of creative art teaching such as looking-and-talking-about art, questioning-and-answering, team work, group discussion, and Six-W reflective thinking. Contains a diagram with an overview of the flexible structure of the program and 7 references. (BT)

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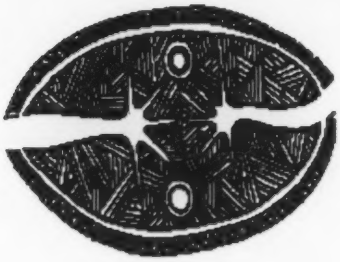

"Cultural Practices in Making of Installation Art: A New Perspective to Preparing Future Art Teachers"

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CULTURAL PRACTICES IN MAKING OF INSTALLATION ART: A NEW PERSPECTIVE TO PREPARING FUTURE ART TEACHERS

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Introduction

In recent years, Taiwanese society is changing and moving more rapidly than ever. The traditional family values and moral bounds are getting loose, and socio-economical patterns become complicated, while our cultural characteristics are fading too fast to be easily distinguished. Cultural identity has become a hot issue in Taiwan nowadays. As children are increasingly impacted by social, cultural and economic problems, questions are being raised as to how education can be more responsive to young people. How will Taiwan's education lead young students to surviving such dramatic and complicated changes in the society? And, how can art educators deal with issues of cultural awareness and transition in the driving force of globalization?

Taiwanese art educators are challenged with these vital difficulties. A traditional pedagogy and technique-oriented teaching methods have become too outdated to enable students to fight with such a society full of complicated, capricious, confusing and misleading socio-cultural phenomena. This refers to that an art education curriculum change is needed and innovative art programs should be developed with careful consideration of the socio-cultural environment. By exploring through the discussion of cultural and educational implications in installation art, this paper proposes a model of a creative art program by integrating installation art to craft-making class for art teachers.

Installation Art and socio-cultural reflection

According to Oliveira, Oxley and Petry (1994), the term "Installation" is usually used "to describe a kind of art making which rejects concentration on one object in favor of a consideration of the relationships between a number of elements or of the interactions between things and their contexts" (p. 8). Some artists applied methods of installation to transforming an indoor space into a contextual environment for their art works in which the participation of the audience was often taken into account. However, the definition of installation art or the boundary of its dimension is not yet clearly drawn. It is probably because that installation art is a very recent term and developing toward various dimensions. No matter how diverse installation art is, we still can summarize three major characteristics as further discussed in the following:

Application of Readymades and Mixed Media

Since Duchamp devoted himself to making what he called "Ready-Mades" and exhibited them in museum, such as Bicycle Wheel (1913) and Fountain (1917), ready-mades or mass-produced utilitarian objects have characterized the art of installations. The use of ready-mades and mass-produced objects encouraged the discard of single medium and opened a channel to free experiments of all possible materials. It is thus believed that everything can be art. Nowadays, new things, new media, unusual visual experiences, and advanced technology flood into our daily lives, so does installation art reflect such exotic, diverse, complex, technological phenomena.

Happening and Environmental Contexts

From 1950s onwards, a crucial emphasis of installation art is that art is both a period of process, and a kind of environment; that is, art is constructed to be happening in specific space and time. To put it more seriously, the gallery has ceased its conventional activity of showing objects and become "a place to experience experience". (Archer, 1994, p.29) Archer (1994) further explained, "Fundamentally, we are dealing with a shift from art as object to art as process, from art as a 'thing' to be addressed, to art as something which occurs in the encounter between the onlooker and a set of stimuli"(p. 26). This process of

performance , or a happening of this kind, presents itself as a model for events in the everyday which really do happen. Many installation artists do see 'environment' as largely and richly coded. As such it presents a place not only of natural, but also of social, historical, and cultural interest.

Critical Awareness of environment

To many installation artists, the gallery is like a stage, where they can utilize every possible way to present the site as a real situated event. This kind of installations is intended to express the artists' strong awareness and concerns to many problems in the social environment. In gruesome criticism of American life, Kienholz often reproduces a familiar environment that embodies strong emotional impacts of his themes such as his work, The State Hospital (1966), revealing the stupidity or the misery hidden behind the façade of modern society. Along with the increasing problems in our living environments, many contemporary artists focus the content of their work on ecology, the relationship between humans and their environment (Lippard, 1995; Gablik, 1995). Being a part of contemporary art movements, installation art presents itself with a social function in wakening the humanity and respects to the earth and natural environments.

As enlightened from the above discussion, installation art is closely linked to the living culture because the work speaks about images, problems, and feelings most immediate to our lives and environment. However, to most people, it is not as much accessible as it should be. Kanatoni (1998) reported that many visitors came to the teaching staff in the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, with questions, "Why is this art?... Did this artist study art? Why is this in a museum?" (p,33) Not surprisingly, this misperception to many installations is often because of its exotic use of materials, unconventional interpretation of forms, new exploration of formula, and multiple perspectives of the reality. However, the real problem of causing the gap is that our art education seldom includes "the social contexts and emotional sources of students' lives outside the school to the limited range of images and art materials" (Kanatoni, 1998, 34). London (1988) also writes, "our schools seem to be contained within a bubble of time and space, which is all but indifferent to the actual time and experienced life of both teachers and students" (p.34). Such an indifference originates students' difficulties in understanding of the real society and metaphoric interpretations of artists of their own time.

Teaching of installations to pre-service art teachers

Based on these considerations, I perceived the craft-making class could be integrated with learning of installation art to be a more updated, innovative form of promoting visual communication, personal expression, and socio-cultural commentary. An art program oriented to the in-depth understanding of installations and socio-cultural practices was thus designed to serve 240 pre-service teachers who took my course of art and crafts. Only a few of them were art majors, while most of them were from other fields such as language education, math education, early childhood education, and elementary education. The goal of this program was four-fold: 1) introducing students to multiple aspects of installation art, 2) sharpening students' thinking about themselves, and the socio-cultural environment, 3) developing them sensitivity and flexibility toward creative art teaching, and 4) bridging students' social lives with art experience ..

This art program was implemented through strategies of creative art teaching, such as looking-and-talking about art, questioning-and-answering, team work, group discussion, Six-W self-reflective thinking, and ended with a large outdoor exhibition, in which every student had to participate. An overview of the flexible structure of the program (Diagram 1) is illustrated in next page:

Sensitivity to the socio-cultural environment

An important feature of this program is the emphasis of installation art making within cultural contexts. Although installation art originated from the West, yet the flexibility of its expressive vocabulary, forms, styles, and materials allows a wide exploration of the spirits, values, aesthetic conventions, visual meanings, possible materials, and socio-political patterns of the local culture. Activities of this program were oriented to stimulating students to perceive the making of installations from the perspectives of socially and culturally lived experiences, and most importantly, to leading the students actively to tap into a rich plethora of local images, current events, social realities, popular cultures and political situations.

This program was started with an appreciation of installation artworks by western and Taiwanese artists to which critical comparisions of installations from different cultures were applied. As are seen in both western and Taiwanese works of installations, visual languages and technicques are similar, but the manipulation of those visual elements, symbols, contents, and meanings is different in respect to different socio-cultural contexts. In reviewing installations of Taiwanese artists, it becomes apparent that works are interwoven with Taiwanese socio-cultural and historical contexts. For example, Taiwanese artists, Wu Tein Chang' and Wu Ma Li utilized visual resources and images selected from Taiwanese popular culture for their installations, which were attended to mocking at Taiwanese vulgar tastes, materialization, and many ideological problems in Taiwanese contemporary culture.

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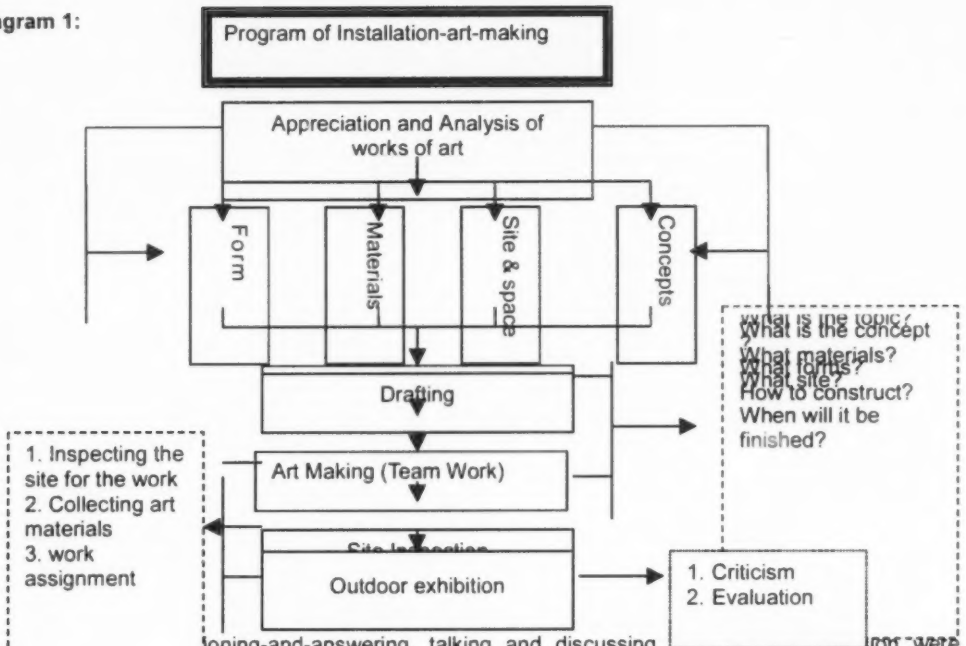
Diagram 1:



joning-and-answering, talking and discussing, [illegible] were also appl guided to observe and analyze how the artists dealt with materials, structures, process, and environemntal contexts, and how the artists perceived and protrayed their own society and cultures. Then, students were requested to think about their own socio-cultural issues and their own ways of expression. The purpose was to develop students' sensitivity and critical thinking to their socio-cultural environment.

In this program, students were divided into 40 groups and each had to make a project of installation art. These projects were responsive to a wide variety of topics and issues covering from political, racial, educational, cultural, social, and ecological problems in the contexts of Taiwan's society, to problems of humanity. It is apparent that these students were aware of the debatable issues about their living environment, and always had keen insights into our social, political and economical problems. However, they simply had little chances to make their voices heard.

Contacts with the community

Students were encouraged to utilize materials, objects or ready-mades from local communities as their works were related to their lived experiences and living environment. There were two reasons to support such a notion: first, these materials or objects were often connoted with cultural values and symbolic meanings that would make the work more accessible to the audience, and secondly, finding materials from local areas would decrease the costs of materials. However, an underlying purpose was to force students to step into the surrounding areas and make contacts with the local community.

Many groups were wonderful explorers and communicators in finding and borrowing materials for their projects. Students told me that many farmers or villages were nice and hospitable in helping them. An old woman told them many stories and customs while giving them her almost 40-year-old chairs and agricultural tools. However, some farmers were curious why they needed those materials. The students replied that they were making installation art. This answer caused even more wonders to those farmers. The students thus explained installation art briefly to them. They also invited these farmers to the exhibition for a better understanding of installation art. As we can see, this kind of adventure has not only opened a channel for students to know more about the surrounding areas, but also bridged a way of communication between students and the community.

Active Reaching-Out

A very high percentage of people, including college students, in Taiwan have not visited art museums or participated in any art related activities. Most of them still believe that art is something beautiful and pleasant. Installation art is extremely new and unacceptable to them. The ending activity, an outdoor exhibition, thus played an active role of reaching out to the public. As soon as those 40 large works of installation art were installed on grass yards, sidewalks, and courtyards on campus, they immediately drew

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students' attentions and discussion. Comments and arguments were often heard around the campus during that week of exhibition. Some of their comments were positive, while a lot of them were negative. No matter whether the comments were positive or negative, talking about art had begun.

Conclusion

Van Mannen (1977) contends that teachers must begin to explore ways in which they can reinterpret their own experiences within the cultural contexts of living among others. This program acknowledges art as a broad avenue to interacting and understanding a culture, meanwhile, offering a model of empowering students with confidence, clarity, and commitment through the process of making installation art. From the thorough review of the installation-art-making program, we can see that critical-reflective inquiry, group discussion, constructive learning, problem-solving, and decision making were served as means by which to construct a socio-cultural base about creative art teaching. This socio-culture-oriented program focuses on installation art as socio-cultural product, as well as artistic product, and recognizes pedagogical contents as a widely expanding dimension to covering the entire socio-cultural environment. The technique-oriented pedagogy becomes an extremely narrow view to contemporary dynamic world, and has to give ways to a socio-cultural based art education.

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